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The Reception Of Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna's Work *Łódeczka* – A Reader Response Study.

Odbiór utworu *Łódeczka* Kazimiery Iłłakowiczówny –
„odpowieź czytelnika”

KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents a study of the reception children's literature using the work by Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna entitled *Łódeczka* [Little Boat] from *Zwierzaki i ziola* [Animals and Herbs] (1985). The research involved actual readers, both children and adults. The author's aim was to discern what features of the text drew the audience's particular attention, whether there were differences in the reception depending on age, and what kind of sensations were elicited. The short story triggered various reactions connected to the sensory realm, mostly tactile, and evoked feelings associated with subjective experiences. The reception highlighted the existence of a memory of haptic sensations as well as acknowledged the poetics of the text as emotionally charged, sensual and intimately connected to the body.

SŁOWA KLUCZE

odpowieź
czytelnika, twórczość
dla dzieci Kazimiery
Iłłakowiczówny,
samoestetyka

ABSTRAKT

W artykule przedstawiono badania recepcji literatury dziecięcej na przykładzie utworu Kazimiery Iłłakowiczówny pt. *Łódeczka* ze zbioru *Zwierzaki i ziola* (1985). Badaniami objęto rzeczywistych czytelników – dziecięcych i dorosłych. Autorka starała się ustalić, jakie własności tekstu zwróciły szczególną uwagę odbiorców, czy istnieją różnice w re-

cepcji dorosłych i dzieci oraz jakiego typu doznania wywołuje odbiór tekstu Iłakowiczówny. Krótkie opowiadanie uruchomiło obszerny teren autoodczuć powiązanych ze sferą zmysłową, najczęściej taktylną, przywołując jednocześnie uczucia towarzyszące subiektywnym przeżyciom. Odbiór dowiódł istnienia pamięci haptycznych doznań oraz ukazał poetykę tekstu jako nacechowane emocją, zmysłowo-cieleśne „terytorium”.

The exploration of readerly mental imagery and embodied cognition has garnered considerable attention in recent scholarship (Kuzmičová, 2014). This study endeavors to delve into how Kazimiera Iłakowiczówna’s selected works for children resonate with the audience’s sensory experiences.

Iłakowiczówna’s works for children are little known and are of interest mainly to researchers. Notably, her poetry volumes such as *Children’s Rhymes* (1923) and *Animals and Herbs* (1960), despite their limited incorporation into educational syllabi, stand as remarkable achievements of children’s poetry. Scholarly focus often gravitates towards the poet’s lyrical oeuvre, the verses within *Children’s Rhymes* being lauded for their “nuanced poetic expression” (Chęcińska, 1994) and seamless integration into pedagogical frameworks promoting “education through art” (Zawistowska, 1978, p. 132). The release of this volume, which soon garnered praise from critics, marked a significant juncture, both in Iłakowiczówna’s artistic trajectory and the evolution of children’s lyric poetry. Noteworthy features include the evocative language, abundant metaphors, and imagery juxtaposing childhood innocence with the complexities of adulthood. Iłakowiczówna’s imaginative constructs transport readers into realms of children’s play, domestic settings, and verdant gardens, populated by a menagerie of animals and plants (domestic and wild), alongside the presence of Catholic saints who come down from the altars to accompany children and dolls. This whimsical tapestry, however, carries an undercurrent of melancholy, perhaps reflective of the poet’s personal experiences, palpable in the emotive language and thematic motifs (Baluch, 1987, pp. 93–100; 1993, pp. 34–45; Baran and Pierzchala, 1994; Chęcińska, 1998; Ungeheuer-Gołąb, 2016).

Karol Szymanowski, renowned composer of the early 20th century, recognized the unique musicality within Iłakowiczówna’s verses. In his song cycle titled *Children’s Rhymes*, *Op. 49*, Szymanowski not only drew inspiration from their structural elements but also embraced their thematic essence, weaving the buzzing of bumblebees and the ferocity of hornets into his compositions (Rosół, 2019).

As Danuta Zawistowska observes:

Kazimiera Hłakowiczówna's adept stylization of speech and the vivid child's imagination characteristic of her poetic works have proven particularly effective in compositions intended for children, and even – as one can assume – facilitated her seamless transition into this genre of writing. Employing a repertoire of well-established linguistic techniques, Hłakowiczówna achieved a distinctive and unparalleled style, characterized by a shift away from abstract vocabulary in favor of concrete language, a prevalence of nouns and verbs reflecting the child's perspective, the incorporation of intonational forms to convey a childlike spontaneity and emotional depth, a consistent syntactic structure devoid of ellipses, and a preference for simple sentences over complex constructions (1978, p. 142).

The poet carefully selected literary devices so that her works did not descend into simplistic or infantile tones. As Regina Kozubowska (2009, p. 131) notes, the choice of words played a crucial role in ensuring that Hłakowiczówna's poems maintained a sophisticated sensibility. These techniques permeate the majority of her works, which primarily fall within the realm of children's lyricism rather than mere literature for children, although she also explored the latter. Alongside her poetic endeavors, Hłakowiczówna ventured into short prose pieces and mini-stories, often imbued with didactic elements. Even in prose, the poet's penchant for poeticism tends to shine through in her deliberate selection of words, sentence structure, and vivid imagery.

The selection of Hłakowiczówna's works for analysis is deliberate, as her oeuvre offers profound insights into the human psyche and emphasizes that "being with and for others means the ability to mentally, spiritually and morally coexist with other people" (Chojnowski, 2019, p. 42). While the focus of this study lies primarily on the linguistic-textual analysis, it is crucial to acknowledge that insights into poetry emerge not solely from the text itself but also from the readers' reception and subsequent reactions.

Central to this study is Hłakowiczówna's prose work featured in her relatively overlooked children's book, *Animals and Herbs*, illustrated by Janusz Grabiański. This collection includes a selection of poems and short stories. Urszula Chęcińska, in her analysis, highlights the lyrical works within this volume, noting the omission of didactic prose pieces, which form an integral part of the collection (1994, p. 69). Zawistowska underscores the volume's departure towards realistic themes, "As an artistic form adequate to this realistic literalism, the author very often opts for ... prose, manifested through prose narratives or descriptive passages (1978, p. 139).

One such narrative, "Little Boat" exemplifies Hłakowiczówna's mastery of literary devices within a concise narrative framework. Despite its brevity comprising only seven sentences, the text's arrangement, choice of words and expressions contribute to its aesthetic appeal. Among the literary techniques employed here are alliterations and

anaphors, which occur in successive sentences—“from paper...,” “from matches...,” “from lint...” —enhancing the fluidity and expressiveness of the statement. Additionally, the poet utilizes a specific form of repetition by referring back to the preceding sentence: “little man-little man” “doggie- doggie.” This technique strengthens the meaning of the repeated words and imbues the text with artistic qualities. Zbigniew Baran and Marta Pierzchała identify similar artistic techniques in Hłakowiczówna’s poetry, particularly in *Children’s Rhymes* (1994, p. 89). The incorporation of poetic devices in a short story about arts and crafts for children—a child’s game—seems to underscore Hłakowiczówna’s propensity to astonish readers by juxtaposing contrasting ideas, symbols, and imagery. The concentration of literary techniques, distinctive language reminiscent of a child’s vernacular, and the thematic focus of the narrative have the potential to evoke a unique reader response¹ and affect the emotions of the audience.

In recent years, scholars have increasingly focused on embodied language, particularly metaphors, recognizing their role in shaping cognitive processes. Consequently, metaphors have garnered greater interest compared to other stylistic devices. The seminal work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) has spurred interdisciplinary interest of linguists, psychologists and neuroscientists, prompting investigations into the neurological underpinnings of metaphor comprehension. The embodiment of certain linguistic constructs has always been present and envisaged by authors such as philosophers, poets, educators, as well as by readers. However, recent neurological research has revealed that the impact of metaphors on the human brain is far more complex than previously believed. Studies have demonstrated that the involvement of different brain centers in understanding metaphors varies depending on the type (Krasoń, 2005; Łukasik, 2021). Additionally, scholars have emphasized the significance of sensory-motor experiences in literary engagement (Krasoń, 1998), echoing Jerzy Cieślowski’s pioneering insights into children’s kinesthetic learning. In his renowned work *Wielka zabawa* [Great Fun] (1985), the Wrocław-based researcher integrated games, plays, and verbal compositions for children, highlighting the significance of children’s physical movement (1985).

As educators, we understand the significance of the formative early years, the imperative of object exploration, and the innate curiosity to engage with the environment. Likewise, as literary scholars, we recognize the evocative potency of literature. Maintaining such an attuned outlook towards the world throughout life—through direct experiential engagement—is crucial in navigating the realms of art, including literary works. This is because the sensory imprints formed through physical interactions resurface during moments of literary immersion, and emotional responses to

1 I refer to the notion of *reader response* and literary research citing the study of physical audiences.

literature as noted by Modrak (2016, p. 116). While much has been explored, the challenge of interpreting literature persists. Scholars like Terry Eagleton and Jonathan Culler have raised questions about the literary qualities of texts (Miall, 2006, pp. 291–292). The central concern revolves around whether the experience of reading a text with literary merit is uniform across all audiences and if every text lends itself to literary interpretation. This topic has elicited diverse perspectives and remains a subject of debate.

The research pursued by psychologists and neurolinguists predominantly revolves around empirical reading. While some may argue that the empirical approach aligns with the interpretive nature of literary research—given that researchers engage with literature to explore it—I hold a differing perspective. Literary inquiry typically adheres to specific methodologies, with interpretive researchers seldom delving into the thoughts, let alone feelings, of the author of a scientific text (Miall, 2006, p. 292). Reflections on the researcher's emotions or perceptions are infrequent. If one were to seek this type of interpretive approach within Polish literary scholarship, particularly in the realm of children's literature, I would mention scholars such as Joanna Papuzińska, Alicja Baluch, Alicja Mazan-Mazurkiewicz, and Katarzyna Ślany who exemplify a narrative style marked by “personal paths” and metaphors that offer insights into the researcher's emotional experiences. This form of “reading” embodies a phenomenological approach, which facilitates a deeper understanding “for oneself,” interpreting the text through the lens of the reader's emotions (Ricoeur, 1989, pp. 242-244). The following interpretation, employing self-feelings, serves as an illustrative example of this approach. I believe that, in many instances, researchers cannot wholly separate their academic ideas from their emotional experiences.

Reading “Little Boat” – an introspective perspective

Excerpt:

We'll use paper to craft a boat with a sail. With matches and a few pea grains, we'll make a little man to sit beside the sail. Using a fluffy bit of cotton wool and two pins, we'll fashion a little doggie to sit at the helm. When it rains and a big, clear puddle forms, we'll set the boat with the little man and his doggie afloat. Let's call the little man Kasper (Hłakowiczówna, 1970).

The naïve imagery depicted by the author evokes a sense of unease in adult readers. It brings back nostalgic recollections of childhood games with a parent, sibling, or grandparent. Perhaps it was a lazy summer Sunday afternoon, when sitting at the kitchen table, we were crafting a new world together with the father. Or maybe it was

summer vacations, when we were preparing activities for overcast days. “We’ll use paper to craft a boat with a sail,” conjures the tactile sensation of a delicate, slightly yellowed piece of paper we borrowed from the mother’s letter-paper folder. This piece of paper, no longer destined for correspondence, will transform into a fragile vessel set to explore new horizons.

“With matches and a few pea grains, we’ll make a little man” evokes memories of lightweight matches igniting with a yellow flame as soon as dad rubs the rough side of the box. Those matches must not be touched, lest you want to “burn like Zosia.” These matches, typically associated with danger, instill a sense of caution, yet today, we harness their potential. Delicately placing shelled pea seeds atop them, a little moist, but deliciously fragrant and firm, we tread carefully, wary of applying too much pressure to the wooden sticks.

“Using a piece of cotton wool and two pins, we’ll fashion a small doggie” – Is this the same cotton wool my mother once used to dab away a drop of blood after a pin prick? And is it the same pin as well? The cotton wool feels light and soft, while the pins are slippery and easily misplaced, making them difficult to grip between the fingertips. When will our boat finally set sail on a vast expanse of clear water? How much longer must we wait for the rain? The yearning is overwhelming. Especially now, with the little man already positioned at the sail and the doggie gripping the rudder in its paws, the longing becomes almost unbearable. After all, the little man is Kasperek, and I am Kasperek

This brief passage sets in motion profuse personal sensations tied to the sensory realm, particularly tactile experiences, while evoking emotions linked to childhood memories. The introspection sheds light on tactile memories (Smolinskaya, 2020) triggered by the act of reading. Why do these memories surface? Is the emotional tone of the content the primary catalyst for the overall emotional response? To what extent does the reader’s individual experience influence their interpretation? How significant are individual words in shaping the reader’s perception? And finally, does syntax play a role as well? The sentences employed here are concise and straightforward, primarily comprising one-verb, single clauses, with one exception that unfolds into a narrative arc. Limited spatial descriptions constrain the full view, suggesting that much is yet to unfold. Verb forms such as “we will craft,” “we will fashion,” “we will set,” “we will fashion” indicate anticipation, subtly impeding the immediacy of visual imagery expressed in the present tense.

Words that work in a tactile context are “paper,” “matches,” “pea grains,” “a fluffy bit of cotton wool,” “two pins.” All of them in some way correspond to fingers, suggest grasping, and therefore touch. Phrases like “we’ll make a little man,” “a little man beside the sail,” and “we’ll fashion a small doggie” further contribute to this tactile effect. In the latter part of the story, articulated through a long, complex sentence, there is

a shift towards visual imagery, evoking a different atmosphere. Key thematic elements emerge through words like “rain,” “forms,” “a big, clear puddle,” “we’ll set the boat with the little man and his doggie afloat.” These concentrated images allow readers to vividly imagine the scene: as the sky darkens with clouds, raindrops cascade through the air, forming a large, glistening puddle; as the sun peeks through the clouds, the puddle takes on a soft blue hue. With delicate care, we cradle the boat with the little man and his dog, poised to set sail upon the water’s surface. The last sentence of the piece prompts questions: Is Kasperek the first reader? Is Kasperek me?

The introspective approach does not seek to project similar reception to future readers, but rather helps the researcher understand what influenced their selection of text. It reveals the aspects of the work that prompted the decision to undertake the study. In the forthcoming analysis, I address the sensations experienced by the readers of Iłakowiczówna’s texts. I collected the respondents’ declared opinions on emotions, reflections, and ideas associated with their reading experience to uncover the nature of the readers’ response to the story.

Reflections from the survey

I conducted the survey among adults and children, encompassing 8 individuals aged between 40 and 60, 45 students aged 22 to 24 (this group being more numerous due to easy access to respondents who were my students), and 25 children aged 7 to 10. In total, 78 respondents agreed to participate in the study.² Given that the study was merely a trial, a preliminary exercise aimed at highlighting the relevance of the poet’s story, the focus was not on ensuring equality among the groups. Instead, I aimed to gather the respondents’ reactions to Iłakowiczówna’s text, including emotions, images, reflections, and reminiscences. Hence, the primary research question was: What are the distinctive aspects of the reception of “Little Boat” by Iłakowiczówna among child and adult readers?

The specific questions focused on selected components of reception and read:

1. What is the audience’s opinion about the emotions they feel when reading “Little Boat”?
2. What visual images do respondents report experiencing upon engaging with the text?
3. What introspective reflections are triggered in readers as a result of reading the text?
4. What is the respondents’ attitude toward the vocabulary used in the text?

² In the case of children, I also obtained the consent of their parents.

In order to gather information on reader responses related to the reception of the selected short story, I used the survey method and interview technique. The starting point was an attempt to interpret the short story, which I did in order to detect important meanings and places relevant to the reader response. This allowed me to relate the collected data also to my own feelings and reflections on an introspective basis. The respondents read the text independently.

To collect data on reader responses regarding the reception of the short story, I employed a combination of survey methodology and interview techniques. Initially, I interpreted the short story to identify key meanings and places pertinent to the reader response. This allowed me to connect the data with my personal feelings and reflections in an introspective manner. Respondents were provided with the text and read it independently.

Audience's opinion on the emotions they feel when reading the text

Table 1. Emotions declared by respondents

Children		Students		Adults aged 40-60	
Positive feelings	Negative feelings	Positive feelings	Negative feelings	Positive feelings	Negative feelings
joy	fear	joy	nostalgia		nostalgia
surprise	sadness	bliss	melancholy		longing
delight	boredom	the love of	anxiety		solitude
		parents who	irritation		sense of
		play with them	emotional		confinement
		warmth	dissonance		feeling of
		feeling carefree			discomfort
		calm			detachment
		sense of			madness
		happiness			loneliness,
		trust			feelings of
		security			sadness and
					emptiness
					anxiety
					fear
					fear of
					loneliness
					anxiety

Respondents aged over 40 expressed a range of emotionally charged feelings, including nostalgia, anxiety, longing, loneliness, and a sense of confinement. They described feelings of discomfort, detachment, and even distress, while reading, along with sensations of sadness, emptiness, and profound anxiety. Some also expressed fear, particularly fear of loneliness or fear for the child. In contrast, individuals around 22 or 23 years old reported feelings of joy, bliss, and the of love parents who used to play with them, as well as feelings of warmth, carefreeness, and security. However, negative emotions such as nostalgia, melancholy, anxiety, and irritation were also mentioned in this age group. Children surveyed, in turn, predominantly expressed feelings of joy, surprise, and delight, although some mentioned fear, especially regarding the paper boat floating on water (that it might get destroyed) and concerns about the safety of the dog. Their responses often referenced personal experiences, such as the death of a pet or ownership of a dog (“I was terrified that the boat might sink, and I felt sad too.” “The dog reminded me of my own dog who got poisoned.” “I was surprised to see the dog at the helm.” “I’m upset that there’s no kitty”). One student candidly stated “I’m happy that the text is short,” while another admitted feeling bored. Nonetheless, most participants focused on describing their personal experiences in response to the story.

Images evoked by reading “Little Boat” as declared by respondents

Table 2. Nature of visualizations declared by respondents

Children	Students	Adults aged 40–60 years
recollection of specific events (games) with a parent with a pleasant connotation	pleasant images from childhood	nostalgic or sad memories of childhood bittersweet images from the family home during childhood

The gathered data unveiled the mental images that respondents reported visualizing as they engaged with the story. These encompassed various objects, characters, and scenarios. For instance, adults recalled imagery such as a kitchen table, a roll of paper, a moist pea seed, a puddle in the yard, a child playing in a puddle, solitary play, a son interacting with his parents, and a mother playing with her child, frequently associated with feelings of nostalgia.

However, the children’s responses were different, including mentions of a boat on the water, a paper boat, a puddle, a dog, the sea, a stormy sea, a calm sea without

waves, tranquil waters, the ocean, children playing, a child playing by the sea, the sun breaking through the clouds, a sunny day, a man with a dog, and a family with a child.

In the student group, some responses were more elaborate, and incorporated narrative elements. For instance: “I see myself as a child playing in puddles, recalling memories of splashing around with friends after rainfall”; “an elderly grandmother and her granddaughter seated at a weathered wooden table”; “parents constructing a boat for Kasper”; “approaching clouds and rain, forming puddles, I visualize the characters embarking on their journey”; “a man preparing for an expedition, accompanied by his faithful dog”; “I recall my grandmother reading to me from a beautifully illustrated book”; “memories of childhood games, crafting bark boats with my grandfather and watching them float, creating figurines from chestnuts, sewing dolls with my grandmother”; “I see the sandy road by my aunt’s summer home”; “I’m eight years old, running barefoot with cousins through rain-soaked puddles, clutching large leaves and waving them, we want to chase the storm away”; “releasing leaves onto the puddles and blowing to race our makeshift boats.”

Respondents’ reflections triggered by the text

Table 3. Reflections declared by respondents

Children	Students	Adults aged 40-60 years
reminiscing about playing with a parent and using objects fantasy stories	a nostalgic childhood memory associated with creative activity, questions about Kasperek’s journey	association with childhood and fun crafts with a parent or grandparents didactic reflections childhood as nostalgia thoughts about the alienation and loneliness of adults/ children

Among the children’s responses were nostalgic reflections, such as: “This poem brings back memories of when I was 8 years old, filling up the pool and setting sail with a paper boat.” “It reminds me of my Barbie house, where I had the best times with my friends.” “I recall gathering chestnuts with my dad and crafting figures out of them at home”; “I remembered being a little girl on a boat with my mom, still wearing diapers just in case, and feeling the urge to pee. Mom suggested using the diaper, but I resisted, and I don’t remember what happened next”; “I recalled making origami with my mom, crafting airplanes, and doing drawings and homework.” “We used to build a bench with my friends, which was a blast.”

Young adults predominantly reminisced about pleasant childhood memories. However, those over 40 often provided responses devoid of emotional attachment or depicted more pessimistic scenes. Child respondents typically, though not universally, associated the text with memories of play.

Respondents also shared lengthier narratives, often revolving around children and adults engaging in play with natural materials like sticks, sand, clay, and chestnuts. The notion of childhood was frequently mentioned, albeit without elaboration, merely as a passing thought that “popped into [their] head.” The text evoked memories of playing with grandparents or parents, sometimes even with grandfather. It stirred up nostalgic recollections of childhood, which young adults associated with creativity, rural settings, and carefree moments. Many of these anecdotes were connected with the storyline. However, some narratives expanded beyond the text's content, almost supplementing the story. These narratives often contemplated the safety of the voyagers, pondering what might befall the little man and the dog if they encountered rough seas. They also prompted reflections on life as a journey, a voyage toward an uncertain destiny.

Two children offered their imaginative twists: “The story felt a bit lacking. Maybe there could've been a monster gobbling up the boat. Then, the dog and the little man built a car and zoomed off. Once they drove away, they built a house and lived happily ever after”; “I pictured the boat being crashed by an alien. I imagined the boat didn't float but flew. The scared boys, who happened to be nearby, dashed away. The alien quickly vanished, when he saw TV reporters. The next day, the boys built their boat.”

Teachers and some students of education focused on the educational aspects, while children related the story to a boat journey or the role of parents in their lives. For each respondent, the story sparked reflection—a thought that encapsulated the essence of the tale. Some unearthed allegorical or symbolic meanings in it, such as life's journey, transitioning into adulthood, a child's solitude in the grown-up world, isolation, madness, chasing dreams, and the power of motherhood.

Respondents' attitudes toward the vocabulary used in the text

Also interesting are the results I got from a study of the vocabulary used in the poet's text. The lexemes most often indicated as important words were: “little man”, “we will make”, “we'll craft”, “dog,” “boat.” These are the words that form the canvass of the content. They were followed by “rain,” “puddle,” “Kasperek,” “will form,” “fluffy bit.” Expressions that caught the respondents' attention included: “we'll craft a little doggie”; “we'll make a little man”; “With matches and a few pea grains, we'll

make a little man.” It is interesting that the children paid attention to the hopeful phrase “we’ll set the boat with the little man and his doggie afloat,” recognizing that it is important. It should be noted that it expresses faith in the dream of the journey, striving for the desired goal, and taking on new challenges.

Some individuals remarked on the vocabulary, describing it as archaic or childish, while also noting the ambivalent feelings it triggers by combining diminutive words with those carrying negative connotations (e.g., “we’ll craft [Polish *ukręcić*, which means ‘twist’] a little doggie”). One respondent even commented: “The diminutives sound endearing yet simultaneously irritating”; “*Ukręcimy pieska* (we’ll craft a doggie) gives the impression that someone’s head is about to be twisted”; “I find the term *człowieczek* (little man) quite bothersome”; “I have a negative association with ‘peas’”; “*Ukręcimy pieska* [we’ll craft a doggie] triggers emotional discomfort”; “*ukręcimy*, and *zmajstrujemy* (we’ll craft, we’ll fashion) are unsettling phrases”; “*Ukręcimy* (we’ll craft) sounds dreadful, as though someone is being harmed.”

From what I observed, the text resonated with some respondents as it brought back their memories. Older individuals expressed feelings of sadness, loneliness, and anxiety. This could be linked to challenging memories from childhood, or it might suggest that as one transitions away from youth, one begins to experience emotional dissonance that prevents only happy memories from lingering. The story prompted a reaction from every adult and child surveyed, underscoring the importance of literature and its profound role in human life.

Conclusion

The data gathered addresses the issue of perceiving and interpreting literary works, a topic Stanley Fish extensively explores. According to Sven Strasen, the distinction between perception and interpretation can be eliminated. In interpretation, researchers engage in a dialogue with the text through a lens of “seeing as,” in which case all interpretation is dependent on/derived from culture. Fish believes that the reception and interpretation of literature are shaped by interpretive communities, which unconsciously impact the outcome of reception (Strasen, 2013, pp. 33–34). Our data reflects subtle differences based on respondents’ occupations or student status. Some approached the literary text with a conventional mindset, focusing more on interpretation than on identifying internal sensory experiences. However, some interviewees managed to introspect and articulate their emotions, feelings, and sensory encounters. I find this aspect of the data particularly insightful, as it sheds light on how the text resonates during reception.

Interestingly, only a few respondents used terminology related to the body, corporeality, and sensuality. Phrases such as “bothers me,” “negative sensation,” “the feeling of cold drops on the skin,” “bliss,” “frailty,” “fragility,” “warmth,” “the smell of air after rain,” and “the feeling of impermanence” were mentioned. Despite the limited use of such terminology, all references to images and feelings testify to emotional, sensory, and corporeal reception.³

Considering the poetics of the text and its impact on reader response, Hłakowiczówna's work can be described as an emotionally charged “territory.” It may seem paradoxical that it is precisely this aspect of children's literature that I consider important given its educational function. However, I believe that in early encounters with literature, the young reader's sensory experiences are just as—if not more—important than cultural or cognitive ones. Similar to David Miall, I argue that it is worth exploring the role of feelings in literary reception. The researcher asks “to what extent feeling may be said to guide the reader's interpretive activity, doing so at a level more fundamental than the cognitive processes involved in reading about which much more is known” (Miall, 2008, p. 379). This perspective finds support in the work of Katarzyna Krasoń (2005, pp. 114–121), who, drawing from Carl Hanford's research (1998, p. 50), stresses the pivotal role of emotion and expression in engaging with poetry. Krasoń's empirical studies substantiate this claim.⁴ Additionally, Susan Cain discusses a “bittersweet” aspect of art reception. Despite evoking feelings of sadness and melancholy, reception of art can lead to a liberating form of expressive creativity (2022, p. 25), sometimes felt throughout the entire body.

I have gathered insights on the reception of children's literature text by adults and children. The decision to include adult respondents was not random. An adult reader approaches a “children's” text with a distinct baggage of experiences that he or she has accumulated over his or her entire lifetime. It is this reservoir of experiences that forms a bridge between the adult reader with the adult writer. I have the impression that somewhere “in between” there is a line of demarcation between these two realms: that of children and adults, which both divides and unites them. Hłakowiczówna's works straddle the line between child and adult reception, appealing to both audiences. Scholars such as Jerzy Cieślowski, Jolanta Ługowska, Ryszard Waksmund, Danuta Zawistowska, Bogusław Żurkowski, Alicja Baluch and others have observed this duality in the reception of the so-called “children's poems.” Although the short story under study may not fit the mold of a typical children's poem, its undeniable

3 Because I treat the reader/viewer as a sensory-corporeal-somatic whole, in my understanding the sensory-corporeal nature of “experiencing” (the work) is linked to the somatic sphere as the one that receives sensory signals.

4 This theme emerged in the researcher's work as early as the 1990s, appearing in many of her publications. Likewise, I find it in my early reflections on children's literature (Ungeheuer-Gołąb, 1999).

poetic quality and its characteristics resembling “structuring conditioned by children’s imagination type” (Cieślowski, 1971, p. 15) cannot be ignored.

The cited Miall article cites readers’ comments that were collected through the think-aloud method, where respondents comment on the passages of texts they have read, referring them to their own existential experiences from adulthood, usually negative ones. The researcher’s selection of works sets the stage for this context, as they evoke feelings of confinement, lethargy, and anguish (Miall, 2006, p. 307) that the readers’ current situation, as well as the fate of the protagonist may trigger (“The Ancient Mariner”). I became intrigued by how this dynamic unfolds for adult readers of children’s literature, which typically carries a lighter tone. The language, literary techniques, and protagonists of these stories serve as gateways to readers’ long-forgotten sensory memories from their youth. Consequently, readers identify with literary characters who in children’s literature embody a child’s psyche and typical child’s reactions. This shows the importance of reading mediation and children’s early exposure to literature, along with their broader experiences of interacting with people, animals, and objects during their formative years.

In the education system, we often adhere to the notion that reading holds value when readers can relate it to their broader literary and cultural experiences, such as other knowledge from other books. Some even view this ability as a form of code, akin to cultural competence, particularly when a reader is engaging with high-quality literature (Miall, 2006, p. 294; Bourdieu, 1984; Baluch, 2005). Looking at individuals’ reading development, it is indeed the knowledge of works – both their content and form – that matters. This knowledge not only links readers to literature but to culture as a whole, enabling them to understand and relate to literary motifs, themes, and topoi. However, this knowledge is not always paramount in situations of individual subjective reception, where the inherent qualities of a work (foregrounding) take precedence. Miall cites research by Willi van Peer to illustrate this point (Miall, 2006, pp. 297–301; van Peer, 1986). Young children’s literary experiences are still nascent. Children between the ages of five and seven typically have not amassed a wide array of literary encounters. Their exposure to literature is often sporadic, as not all parents and educators possess comprehensive knowledge of literary genres, children’s reading needs, or effective reading instruction methods.

It appears that during childhood, between the ages of 5 and 10, I believe, free literary reading⁵ becomes especially significant. This type of reading allows children to express intuitive, subjective, and expressive sensations derived from their reading experiences. While children of this age may not yet have the vocabulary to articulate

5 Children of this age also often listen to texts read by adults. When I write about literary reading, I also mean a child listening to a literary text.

their emotions or conduct a detailed analysis of their feelings and reflections, they can still convey them through alternative means. Joanna Papuzińska elaborated on this phenomenon years ago, highlighting the distinct characteristics of children's reception of literature (Papuzińska, 1981).

Harnessing the power of this form of engagement with literature within the school education process could prove beneficial. Engaging in spontaneous, unrestricted reading allows children to experience the joy of reading, thus fostering a positive attitude towards books in the future. Encouraging child readers to express their genuine inner sensations resulting from reading could lead to valuable insights for further exploration.

When considering a child's reception of a literary text, it is essential to reflect on Lakoff's insights regarding the understanding of metaphor. Lakoff suggests that "with metaphors we need to understand two concepts: the concept relating to the source domain, which is cognitively accessible to us, and the target domain, which is explained by reference to the features of the first domain. To understand the source domain, we rely on our prior knowledge of the concept." (Łukasik, 2021, p. 223; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). However, the source domain may not always be accessible to child readers, and consequently, the target domain may hold different meanings than intended by adults. Therefore, since children may not fully grasp the reflective aspect of reading, participant observation emerges as a valuable research method. This approach, which involves observing children's responses to texts alongside conversations about their experiences, allows for a comprehensive understanding of their reading process. Only by combining verbalized reflections with observed actions can we paint a complete picture of children's reading experiences.

My observations on the reception of the story by the studied group shed light on the concept of reader response. The diversity evident in the audience's reactions underscores the importance of respecting individual perspectives in educational settings. The emergence of subjective feelings during the reading process is a significant factor in understanding and discussing literature as well as the inner world of the reader. It enables adults to better understand children and be aware of their thoughts, emotions, and desires related to reading fiction. The reflections arising from reader response highlight the power of the artistic text to inspire the creation of new meanings. The range of interpretations observed in this study demonstrates the richness of the reading process. It makes us aware of how diverse the thoughts of readers can be, which we often overlook or undervalue, tending to think that our opinion as parents, teachers, researchers is the most important.

It is essential to acknowledge that language education in the early grades (1–3) encompasses more than just learning grammatical and linguistic concepts. It can also provide a valuable platform for exploration and discovery, allowing children to take

on the role of researchers. This can only be successful if adults believe in children's capabilities to explore, create, and understand the world around them.

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